

May 23, 1961

61-4723

MEMORANDUM

TO: The President

FROM: The Vice President

SUBJECT: Mission to Southeast Asia, India and Pakistan

The mission undertaken May 9, 1961, at your request, was informative and illuminating far beyond my expectations. Unusual candor--as well as unusual length--marked exchanges in each country. Each leader visited welcomed and sought to take full advantage of my presence as a means of transmitting to you their strongly held personal views on many matters.

The purpose of this memorandum is to convey much of my own impressions and evaluations as seen most pertinent to decisions now under your consideration. It would be unrealistic to assure that such limited visits afford a basis for detailed substantive policy judgments. It would be equally unrealistic not to recognize that the circumstances and timing of this mission elicited a depth and substance of expression not normally present in exchanges through usual channels. My purpose is to offer perspective--not, I wish to emphasize, to propose details of policy.

The Impact of Laos

There is no mistaking the deep--and long lasting--impact of recent developments in Laos.

Country to country, the degree differs but Laos has created doubt and concern about intentions of the United States throughout Southeast Asia. No amount of success at Geneva can, of itself, erase this. The independent Asians do not wish to have their own status resolved in like manner in Geneva.

Leaders

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White House

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Leaders such as Linn, Chiang, Sarit and Ayub were or were not except that we are making "the best of a bad bargain" at Geneva. Their charity extends no farther.

The Impact of the Mission

Beyond question, your judgment about the timing of our mission was correct. Each leader--except Nehru--publicly congratulated you on the "timing" of this mission. Chiang said--and all others privately concurred--that the mission had the effect of "stabilizing" the situation in the Southeast Asian nations.

What happened, I believe, was this: the leaders visited want--as long as they can--to remain as friends or allies of the United States. The public, or, more precisely, the political, reaction to Laos had drastically weakened the ability to maintain any strongly pro-US orientation. Neutralism in Thailand, collapse in Vietnam, anti-American election demagoguery in the Philippines were all developing prior to our visit. The show of strength and sincerity--partly because you had sent the Vice President and partly, to a greater extent than you may believe, because you had sent your sister--gave the friendly leaders something to "hang their hats on" for a while longer.

Our mission arrested the decline of confidence in the United States. It did not--in my judgment--restore any confidence already lost. The leaders were as explicit as courteous and courtly as men could be in making it clear that deeds must follow words--soon.

We didn't buy time--we were given it.

If these men I saw at your request were bankers, I would know--without bothering to ask--that there would be no further extensions on my note.

The purpose

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The Purpose of Joint Communiqués

Starting with President Diem at Saigon, it was my conclusion that the interests of the United States would be served -- and protected -- by the issuance of joint communiqués. My purpose was this: to attach the signature and the name of each of the leaders to a joint public statement endorsing their acceptance of an agreement with the details of your letters which I delivered in your behalf. Without such statements in writing, it was clear that the United States would be victimized later by self-serving statements that you -- and the Administration -- had offered "nothing" or "too little," etc.

As you recognized, the joint communiqués followed item by item the statements in your letters. In most instances, where substantive pledges and policies were involved, the communiqués were cleared through Washington before issuance. The extensive, important and almost unprecedented communiqué with Nehru largely reflects the high regard the Indian Government holds for Ambassador Galbraith.

I should make these two points clear: assurances I gave were those you sent me to convey, and no commitments were asked and none were given beyond those authorized in your letters. In some instances, for various reasons, I did not express all the commitments or proposals authorized in the State position papers.

The Importance of Follow-Through

I cannot stress too strongly the extreme importance of following up this mission with other measures, other actions, and other efforts. At the moment -- because of Laos -- these actions are hypersensitive to the possibility of American hypocrisy toward Asia. Considering the Vienna talks with Khrushchev -- which, to the Asian mind, emphasize Western rather than Asian concerns -- and considering the negative line of various domestic American editorials about this mission, I strongly believe it is of first importance that this trip bear fruit immediately.

Personal Conclusions from the Mission

I took to Southeast Asia some basic convictions about the problems faced there. I have come away from the mission there -- and to India and Pakistan -- with many of these convictions sharpened and deepened by what I saw and learned. I have also reached certain other conclusions which I believe may be of value as guidance for those responsible in formulating policies.

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These conclusions are as follows:

1. The battle against Communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination to achieve success there -- or the United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores. Asian Communism is congruized and contained by the maintenance of free nations on the subcontinent. Without this inhibitory influence, the island outposts -- Philippines, Japan, Taiwan -- have no security and the vast Pacific becomes a Red Sea.
2. The struggle is far from lost in Southeast Asia and it is by no means inevitable that it must be lost. In each country it is possible to build a sound structure capable of withstanding and turning the Communist surge. The will to resist -- while now the target of subversive attack -- is there. The key to what is done by Asians in defense of Southeast Asian freedom is confidence in the United States.
3. There is no alternative to United States leadership in Southeast Asia. Leadership in individual countries -- or the regional leadership and cooperation so appealing to Asians -- rests on the knowledge and faith in United States power, will and understanding.
4. SEATO is not now and probably never will be the answer because of British and French unwillingness to support decisive action. Asian distrust of the British and French is outspoken. Success at Geneva would prolong SEATO's role. Failure at Geneva would terminate SEATO's meaningfulness. In the latter event, we must be ready with a new approach to collective security in the area.

We should consider an alliance of all the free nations of the Pacific and Asia who are willing to join forces in defense of their freedom. Such an organization should:

- a) have a clear-cut command authority
 - b) also devote attention to measures and programs of social justice, housing, land reform, etc.
3. Asian leaders -- at this time -- do not want American troops involved in Southeast Asia other than on training missions. American combat troop involvement is not only not required, it is not desirable. Possibly Americans -- fail to appreciate fully the subtlety that recently-colonial peoples would not look with favor upon governments which invited or accepted the return this soon of Western troops. To the extent that fear

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of ground troop involvement diminishes our political response to Asia in Congress or elsewhere, it seems most desirable to us to allay these paralyzing fears in confidence, on the strength of the individual statements made by leaders consulted on this trip. This does not minimize or disregard the probability that open attack would bring calls for U.S. combat troops. But the present probability of open attack seems small, and we might gain much needed flexibility in our policies if the spectre of combat troop commitment could be lessened drastically.

6. Any help -- economic as well as military -- we give less developed nations to secure and maintain their freedom must be a part of a national effort. These nations cannot be saved by United States help alone. To the extent the Southeast Asian nations are prepared to take the necessary measures to save our aid activities, we can be -- and must be -- contributing to our existence. It would be useful to announce more clearly that we have -- for the guidance of these young and unsophisticated nations -- what we expect or require of them.
7. In large measure, the greatest danger Southeast Asia offers to nations like the United States is not the momentary threat of Communism itself, rather that danger stems from hunger, ignorance, poverty and disease. We must -- whatever strategies we evolve -- keep these crises the point of our attack, and make imaginative use of our scientific and technological capability in such enterprises.

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8. Vietnam and Thailand are the immediate--and most important--trouble spots, critical to the U.S. These areas require the attention of our very best talents--under the very closest Washington direction--on matters economic, military and political.

The basic decision in Southeast Asia is here. We must decide whether to help these countries to the best of our ability or throw in the towel in the area and pull back our defenses to San Francisco and a "Fortress America" concept. More important, we would say to the world in this case that we don't live up to treaties and don't stand by our friends. This is not my concept. I recommend that we move forward promptly with a major effort to help these countries defend themselves. I consider the key here is to get our best MACV people to control, plan, direct and exact results from our military aid program. In Vietnam and Thailand, we must move forward together.

a. In Vietnam, Diem is a complex figure beset by many problems. He has admirable qualities, but he is remote from the people, is surrounded by persons less admirable and capable than he. The country can be saved--if we move quickly and wisely. We must decide whether to support Diem--or let Vietnam fall. We must have coordination of purpose in our country team, diplomatic and military. The Saigon Embassy, USIA, MACV and related operations leave much to be desired. They should be brought up to maximum efficiency. The most important thing is imaginative, creative, American management of our military aid program. The Vietnamese and our MACV estimate that \$50 million of U.S. military and economic assistance will be needed if we decide to support Vietnam. This is the best information available to us at the present time and if it is confirmed by the best Washington military judgment it should be supported. Since you proposed and I am agreed to a joint economic mission, it should be appointed and proceed forthwith.

b. In Thailand, the Thais and our own MACV estimate probably as much is needed as in Vietnam--about \$50 million of military and economic assistance. Again, should our best military judgment concur, I believe we should support such a program. Sarit is more strongly and staunchly pro-Western than many of his people. He is and must be deeply concerned at the consequences to his country of a communist-controlled Laos. If Sarit is to stand firm against neutralism, he must have--soon--concrete evidence to show his people of United States military and economic support. He believes that his armed forces should be increased to 150,000. His Defense Minister is coming to Washington to discuss aid matters.

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9. The Republic of China on Taiwan was a pleasant surprise to me. I had been long aware of the criticisms against Chiang Kai-shek and his government and cognizant of the deep emotional American feelings in some quarters against him. I know these feelings influence our US policy.

Whatever the cause, a progressive attitude is emerging there. Our conversations with Chiang and Mr. Chiang were dominated by discussions of measures of social progress, to my unexpected but gratified surprise. As with the Republic of Germany in Western Europe, so I believe we might profitably and wisely encourage the Republic of China in Asia to export talents, skills, and resources to other Asian lands to assist in programs of progress.

10. I was assured that there were no problems for the U.S. in the Philippines. There is a great reservoir of good feeling toward America among Filipinos, with many of the usual Latin qualifications. But a widespread belief that corruption exists is sapping the effectiveness of the government. Apathy of the leadership from the people seems a problem.

11. India could well be the subject of an entire report. Nehru, during our visit, was clearly "neutral" in favor of the West. This Administration is highly regarded and well received in India. Only part of this flows out of hope or expectation of aid. Mainly, there is an intellectual affinity, or an affinity of spirit. This, in my judgment, should be exploited not with the hope of drawing India into our sphere—which might be as unnecessary as it would be improbable—but, chiefly, with the hope of cementing under Nehru an India-U.S. friendship which would endure beyond any transition of power in India.

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12. President Ayub in Pakistan is the singularly most impressive and, in his way, responsible head of state encountered on the trip. He is conceived as a leader where others are not; confident, straightforward and I would judge, dependable. He is frank about his belief, offensive as it is to us, that the form of representative government would only open his country to Communist take-over at this time. Nonetheless, Ayub understands -- and is in agreement with -- the aims of eradicating poverty, ignorance and disease. He can have great influence and -- because of his administrative organization -- achieve dramatic success by supporting Pakistan's needs. Our military should see how to improve the effectiveness and achieve modernization of Pakistan's army. Ayub is wisely aware of Pakistan's strategic position, wants to make his forces more modern, and wants to resolve the Kashmir dispute to release Indian and Pakistani troops to deter the Chinese rather than each other. He spells out the fact that U.S. leadership rests on our own self-confidence and confidence we permit Asians to have in us.

To recapitulate, these are the main impressions I have brought back from my trip.

The fundamental decision required of the United States -- and time is of the greatest importance -- is whether we are to attempt to meet the challenge of Communist expansion now in Southeast Asia by a major effort in support of the forces of freedom in the area or throw in the towel. This decision must be made in a full realization of the very heavy and continuing costs involved in terms of money, of effort and of United States prestige. It must be made with the knowledge that at some point we may be faced with the further decision of whether we commit major United States forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw should our other efforts fail. We must remain master of this decision. What we do in Southeast Asia should be part of a rational program to meet the threat we face in the region as a whole. It should include a clear-cut pattern of specific contributions to be expected by each partner according to his ability and resources. I recommend we proceed with a clear-cut and strong program of action.

I believe that the mission -- as you conceived it -- was a success. I am grateful to the many who labored to make it so.

Lyndon B. Johnson

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